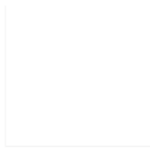


From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
Subject: Floods Inquiry
Date: Monday, 20 June 2022 11:07:15 AM
Attachments: [Flood inquiry photo 2.PNG](#)



Your details

Title	Mrs
First name	Dominique
Last name	Opdam
Email	<input type="text"/>
Postcode	2472

Submission details

I am making this submission as	A resident in a flood-affected area
Submission type	I am making a personal submission
Consent to make submission public	I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Your story	Broadwater (population 640), lies on the fringe of the winding Richmond river and is home to the Sunshine Sugar Mill. Our quiet little town was barely known until 1 March 2022 when it drowned in a devastating flood that ravaged the Northern Rivers.
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More than fifteen weeks later, I feel despair, hopelessness and frustration as the reality of our situation sets in. We are still living in temporary accommodation in Evans Head, our humble cottage is a mouldy, muddy shell and our few, salvaged possessions are stored in Bunnings tubs in our shed. With no prospect of long term accommodation and insurance assessors predicting that our home will take between 12 and 24 months to repair, we have no option but to return to our property and live in our shed.

Our flood story is no different to so many thousands of others in the region.

We received the SES evacuation alert for residents of Broadwater and Cabbage Tree Island via text message at 3pm on the afternoon of Monday 28 February, 2022. Being new to the area and with no previous flood experience, we had no idea how to prepare or what to expect. Our house is raised just under a metre and only ever had water under the house in the 1954 floods. A neighbour told us that it might be bad this time and gestured to show waist height. We packed some valuables and lifted as much as possible onto beds and into the highest shelves of our wardrobe. Our shed is at the back of the property and lower lying. We lifted items and stacked as best we could. All the while being naively optimistic that the river surely wouldn't spill over the banks any further. We checked the river multiple times that day and it hadn't risen. Yet.

My elderly in-laws live in the same street (Little Pitt Street) so we spent hours helping them move items from their ground floor onto tables and higher ground. We heard that people were moving cars to the top of River Street, the highest point in Broadwater. So we joined the queue and parked our cars. This turned out to be the best decision we made that afternoon. We received no official advice apart from that

initial evacuation alert. We had dinner, watched Netflix and went to bed.

Around 11pm I heard a knock on our neighbour's door and a warning that the flood waters were seeping through the drains. I remember being surprised as I thought the flood would come from the river, not the drains. I was worried but not seeing any change in the front or back yard, drifted into a restless sleep. At 2am I was woken by the neighbours evacuating with their bags and dogs. My husband Steve woke with a start and announced, "I can smell the river". The front garden was a pool of water with only the raised path still clear. We opened our back door to our own private lagoon with the shed already under at least a metre of water. The flood waters had silently seeped through the drains until the river joined in, creating a rising expanse of water.

We stumbled through the house, pushing the sleeping cat into his carrier, grabbed the dog, our bags and the kitty litter tray. Then at 2.30am on the morning of 1 March 2022, we waded through knee-deep, putrid river water to my in-laws 2 storey house at the eastern end of Little Pitt Street. Abby, the black Labrador swam and the cat looked on in disbelief.

We passed elderly neighbours viewing the scene in shock. We called out to them but they appeared not to hear. After waking our in-laws and offloading the animals and bags, we went back for one last load with the rising flood water reaching hip height. Steve was worried about our elderly neighbours so he went back to check on them. A long half hour passed before he appeared in sight with old Woody in tow. Jane and her nephew had been asleep but Steve was able to alert them and they made their way to the Community Centre. The water now reached their waists.

Dawn broke and rippled water was reflected on

the bedroom ceiling. Our new world was surreal. The house was entirely surrounded by water. From every upstairs room we had water views. We watched from the safety of the second floor verandah as the flood waters rose steadily and noiselessly throughout the morning. There was a constant stream of boats as residents were evacuated to higher ground. The Community Centre across the street soon had river water washing through the building so that too was evacuated. Most people wore a look of wearied incredulity.

By late morning, the ground floor of our in laws house was almost 2 metres under water. Not many residents were left in Broadwater. Every hour we checked the height of the flood against the next door neighbours' window frame. It inched up, heading for the gable. Even though we were fairly confident that we would be safe on the second floor, we made the decision to join the evacuees as Steve's parents are elderly and frail. Our heroes that day were 3 young surfers from Lennox Head. They waited patiently as we loaded the boats, which were conveniently moored to railings at the rear stairs of the house. Our heroes were sympathetic, obliging and added just the right amount of humour to lighten the mood. As we drifted away from the house, I absorbed the sight before us.

Broadwater village was now Lake Broadwater.

Water lapped the tops of window sills, pitched roofs peeped out from just above the flood level. Our journey wasn't without incident. Our boat became stuck on a fence that lay under water as roads had long disappeared from sight. We were dropped off at the end of the flood water, near the Broadwater M1 exit to a welcoming party offering food, water, a helping hand and a compassionate smile.

The following days were a blur. We slept badly

but thankfully in a motel room supplied by a friend in Evans Head. So many others were in tents or caravans or under the stars. Many still are. Through a family contact and the generosity of the owner, we were able to move into a share house with a kindly, older lady. The abundance of kindness and overwhelming generosity of so many in the Evans and wider community in those post flood weeks and months will stay with us for ever.

Waiting for the flood waters to recede were very difficult days. So many emotions and hindsight moments filled those days. Why didn't we take more items to our in-laws? Why didn't we lift everything into the roof cavity? Why didn't I take my laptop and baby albums with me when we evacuated? I punished myself mercilessly.

The waiting days were spent walking and talking. Communication with fellow flood victims was so important. Evans Head's population swelled with the addition of a few thousand flood victims from the neighbouring towns of Coraki, Woodburn and Broadwater. The Evans Head community was (still is) amazing. They opened their doors and their hearts. Residents welcomed strangers into their homes, meals were provided, and washing machines went into overdrive as salvaged, muddy clothes were cleaned. The local motel took in flood evacuees and the manager cooked dinners for all those affected. More than 3 months later, she is still providing delicious meals for her flood affected guests. Such generosity warmed our battered hearts.

In those early post flood days, official information about the state of our home and town was non-existent. We relied on what we heard on the street or via the Facebook pages, "Evans Head Noticeboard" and "Broadwater Residents Group". We had no idea how high the water had reached in our house until a Broadwater resident motored through the flood waters on Wednesday

afternoon and took photos of each house in Broadwater. The speculation was finally over and we could see for ourselves that our little cottage had been almost entirely submerged. Such a sad image.

After 5 excruciating long days we got the word (unofficial of course) that we were able to retrieve our thankfully undamaged cars from Broadwater Hill and return to view the destruction.

I will never forget the smell that greeted us as we drove into our town and crawled through pot holed, filled streets towards our home. The stench of river water mingled with sewerage, chemicals and petrol assaulted our nostrils. We pried open the front door and viewed the carnage. Tables, chairs, TVs, book cases, books, table lamps, cushions, clothes...all our possessions were upside down, broken, damaged and lying in centimetres of stinking sludge. We climbed over furniture and made our way through each room. Oily mud left itchy streaks on our legs.

We soon made some fascinating discoveries. Beds floated and the most fragile, delicate ornament rose with the flood level and then resettled on the dresser in the exact same spot. The flood had reached to just under the picture rails...about 2 metres into our cottage. We lost almost everything but small wins gave us joy. My laptop, placed high on the top shelf of our wardrobe, had survived. Clothes crammed into these same high shelves were damp but salvageable. The portraits of our 4 children remained untouched on the picture rail and above the flood water level.

Our shed lies lower on the property and so the flood water touched the rafters. With no dividing walls to restrict the water force, the interior would have been a whirlpool of furniture and storage tubs, a collision of its contents. Photo albums,

spilled out of tubs, lay sinking in mud. Every book we owned, saturated by the river had turned into pulp. It was heart-breaking. When I found our children's baby albums, their little faces disappearing in a chemical tie dye, I cried. I felt guilty because I hadn't been able to save them.

It's still hard to describe the plethora of emotions we experienced in those post flood weeks. Shock, disbelief and embarrassment. We felt ashamed that our home was in this state. Adrenaline sustained us as we started the massive clean-up. The following days were devoted to salvaging and cleaning anything that could be saved. A mud army comprising relatives, friends and strangers drove down from Brisbane and up from Sydney to help with the mammoth task of clearing. They were our angels. A selfless group of ordinary but amazing people who worked tirelessly day after day. During the day there was a steady stream of volunteers handing out water, sandwiches and offers of help. Family and friends in Sydney supported us emotionally from afar with phone calls and messages. We were not alone.

Mountains of furniture and ruined possessions grew daily. This tragic image of peoples' lost lives was a familiar sight in every Northern Rivers town.

The loss of my photos was personally heart-breaking and I struggled to keep up with the mammoth task of soaking, separating and drying them. Another angel appeared in the shape of a young teacher and mum from Skennars Head. Seeing my anguish she proceeded to pack tubs of smelly, muddy photos and take them home to work on. Within days she had enlisted a team to help tackle the huge task. We will be forever grateful for everything she did for us.

The worst of times brings out the best in people.

Community HUBs emerged stocked with a wide range of household and personal items – all donated by generous individuals and businesses. Broadwater Community Hub was manned by a vibrant team of volunteers who greeted each customer with respect and warmth. Family dinners, pizza nights and social evenings all contributed to restoring the spirit that was dimmed but not extinguished.

Monetary donations and vouchers from individuals, charities and the state and federal governments were gratefully if not hesitantly received. We felt extremely awkward about accepting monetary help but we had lost almost everything and eventually needed to replace these items and rebuild our lives.

The Broadwater community has demonstrated tremendous resilience throughout this disaster. However, our mental health is fragile. The sound of rain on a tin roof is no longer comforting but fills us with dread. Still, we stubbornly refuse to give up. The desire to return to our own homes and normality is strong.

So what now? More money is needed to help families who can't afford to repair or rebuild. We desperately need a practical and immediate solution to drainage issues in Broadwater. Effective flood mitigation should be a priority in the Northern Rivers. We are thankful for what we have received so far but more action is needed.

We never want to live through another flood.

Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#)

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

- The Morgans development bordered by Pitt Street, George Street and Evans Head Road in Broadwater was previously sugar cane fields where flood waters drained away easily. Now it

is a raised new estate with inadequate drainage that caused major flooding in Pitt Street and George Street whenever there was heavy rain, months before the 1 March flood.

- Motorway (M1) at the southern end of town created a dam wall that prevented flood waters from draining away, causing the flood water to impact the town.
- Increased rain fall due to climate change.

1.2 Preparation and planning

- Non-existent.
- An evacuation alert was sent via text message to all residents of Broadwater and Cabbage Tree Island at 3pm on the afternoon of 28 February. The flood began to seep through the drains at 11pm that evening.

1.3 Response to floods

- SES not seen in Broadwater prior to the flood or in the days after the flood.
- Most assistance came from local volunteers.

1.4 Transition from incident response to recovery

- The army were initially occupied with helping Lismore. When they eventually came to Broadwater, they were keen to help but were largely disorganised and lacking direction. Once the army had their instructions they were hard working and willing to assist in any capacity. Most coordinated responses in the early days came from civilian organisations already in place.

1.5 Recovery from floods

- Community Hubs and Recovery Hubs were invaluable and well used.
- Grants and disaster payments were gratefully received but the application process was not always accessible or easy to navigate.
- More government grants needed.
- More temporary housing needed. Caravans, dongas, container homes or assistance towards shed conversions.
- Flood mitigation works including town drainage and motorway drainage is crucial to prevent flooding of this magnitude.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [Flood inquiry photo 1.jpg](#)
 - [Flood inquiry photo 3.jpg](#)
 - [Flood inquiry photo 2.PNG](#)
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Domi + Poppy
HARRIS 28/9/21

HARRIS
A drawing of a yellow flower with green leaves and a stem.

SAM
A letter or card with some text and a small illustration.

MADE WITH LOVE
A collection of small cards or photos, some with text and illustrations.

RIDE
A green card with a small illustration and the word "RIDE" written on it.

A small blue CD or disc.

A small circular object, possibly a button or a small plate.

A small purple and white decorative object, possibly a figurine or a small toy.

